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Right of Petition.

NEW ENGLAND CLERGYMEN.

REMARKS

OF

MESSRS. EVERETT, MESSRS. DOUGLAS, MESSRS. HOUSTON,
“ MASON, “ BUTLER, “ ADAMS,
“ PETTIT, “ SEWARD, “ BADGER.

ON THE

MEMORIAL

FROM SOME 3,050 CLERGYMEN OF ALL DENOMINATIONS AND SECTS IN THE
DIFFERENT STATES IN NEW ENGLAND, REMONSTRATING AGAINST
THE PASSAGE OF THE NEBRASKA BILL.

SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES, MARCH 14, 1854.

WASHINGTON, D. C.
BUELL & BLANCHARD, PRINTERS.
1854.

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STEREOTYPED AT THE  
BALTIMORE TYPE AND STEREOYPE FOUNDRY,  
LUCAS BROTHERS, PROPRIETORS.  
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RIGHT OF PETITION.

IN SENATE.

TUESDAY, March 14, 1854.

MR. EVERETT, presented a memorial from some three thousand and fifty clergymen of all denominations and sects in the different States in New England, remonstrating against the passage of the Nebraska bill.

The memorial, on the motion of Mr. EVERETT, having been laid upon the table,

Mr. DOUGLAS subsequently rose and said: A memorial has been ordered to lie on the table, which was presented a few minutes ago by the honorable Senator from Massachusetts, [Mr. EVERETT.] I desire to submit a word or two of comment upon it, and therefore I wish to have it read. I think it is not respectful to the Senate.

THE PRESIDENT. The Senator from Illinois moves to take up the memorial which was ordered to lie on the table.

The motion was agreed to.

Mr. DOUGLAS. I would now like to have the memorial read.

It was read, as follows:

To the Honorable the Senate and House of Representatives, in Congress assembled:

The undersigned, clergymen of different religious denominations in New England, hereby, in the name of Almighty God, and in his presence, do solemnly protest against the passage of what is known as the Nebraska bill, or any repeal or modification of the existing legal prohibitions of slavery in that part of our national domain which it is proposed to organize into the territories of Nebraska and Kansas. We protest against it as a great moral wrong, as a breach of faith evidently unjust to the moral principles of the community, and subversive of all confidence in national engagements; as a measure full of danger to the peace and even the existence of our beloved Union, and exposing us to the righteous judgments of the Almighty: and your protestants, as in duty bound, will ever pray.

Boston, Massachusetts, March 1, 1854.

Mr. DOUGLAS. My only object is to call the attention of the Senate to the memorial. It is presented, after the final vote of the Senate, as a protest against our action—against the action in which largely more than two-thirds of this body concurred. It protests against our action as being a breach of faith, as involving a moral wrong, as destructive of all confidence, and as subjecting us to the righteous judgment of the Almighty. It is

presented, too, by a denomination of men calling themselves preachers of the Gospel. Sir, it has been demonstrated in debate that there is not a particle of truth in the allegation of a breach of faith or breach of confidence. It has been demonstrated so clearly, that there is no excuse for any man in the community for believing it any longer. Yet, here we find that a large body of preachers, perhaps three thousand, following the lead of a circular, which was issued by the Abolition confederates in this body, calculated to deceive and mislead the public, have here come forward, with an atrocious falsehood and an atrocious calumny against this Senate, desecrated the pulpit, and prostituted the sacred desk to the miserable and corrupting influence of party politics. It matters not whether the description is confined to narrow limits, or whether it extends to all the clergymen of New England. It matters not whether the misrepresentation has taken a broad scope, or been confined to a few; I hold it as our duty to expose the conduct of men who, under the cloak of religion, either from ignorance or wilful misrepresentation, will avail themselves of their sacred calling to arraign the conduct of Senators here in the discharge of our duties. Sir, I hold that this Senate is as capable of judging whether our action involves moral turpitude, whether it involves the subversion of morals, whether it subjects us to the judgment of the Almighty, as are these political preachers, whose protest proves them to be without any reliable information upon the subject. It is evident, sir, that these men know not what they are talking about. It is evident that they ought to be rebuked, and required to confine themselves to their vocation, instead of neglecting their flocks, and bringing our holy religion into disrepute by violating its sacred principles, and disregarding the obligations of truth and honor, by presenting here a document which is so offensive that no gentleman can indorse it without violating all the rules of courtesy, of propriety, and of honor.

Sir, there seems to be an attempt to pile upon our table offensive document after offensive document, slander after slander, libel after libel, in order that the Abolition press may copy it as coming from the records of the Senate, and go back and give it credit in the country. They are smuggled in here, the

offensive matter concealed from our knowledge until we happen to look into them and see what they are, and then these gentlemen expect to carry on a political campaign by quoting from our own records that we are traitors to our country, traitors to God, and traitors to humanity. I think it is time that this miserable system of electioneering by violating the rules and courtesies of the Senate, to get an indorsement of libels, which men ought to be ashamed to adopt, should be exposed and rebuked. I am not willing that they should be permitted to pile up slander of that kind, insult of that kind, upon our table, and let it then be used for such a purpose. You know, sir, that that memorial is not intended to affect the action of the Senate. We have no such bill before us. Our action is passed. It is not for the purpose of influencing our official conduct. Why is it brought here? There can be no other object in presenting it here now than simply to furnish capital for organizing a great sectional party, and trying to draw the whole religious community into their schemes of political aggrandizement. I think that men ought to be able to rely upon argument, and upon truth, and upon reason, instead of resorting to these things for the purpose of stimulating excitement for political ends. I have no motion to submit, but I felt it to be my duty to call the attention of the Senate to the memorial.

Mr. HOUSTON. I think that a petition of this kind ought to be received, and that it is not subject to the charge brought against it by the Senator from Illinois. It does not arraign our action by being drawn up after that action was had. The Nebraska bill passed this body on the night of the 3d, or rather on the morning of the 4th instant. The memorial appears to be dated on the 1st of March. I cannot think that it meant any indignity to the Senate. There is nothing expressive of any such feeling in it. It is a right that all individuals in the community have, if their terms are respectful, to memorialize the Senate of the United States upon any subject. Whether there is any ulterior object in this, I know not; but from the date of the memorial, and from the number of signers, I am induced to believe that the memorialists thought there was something wrong in that bill; and if they believed that its passage would be a breach of faith on the part of the Government, they had a right to say so. I took the liberty of making the same charge here. There were more questions than that of non-intervention involved in that bill. It involved an infraction of faith with the Indians, of pledges given to them under all the solemn forms, yet mockery, of treaties. That was one point involved; and I charged that the passage of the bill would be a violation of plighted faith in that particular. Was it a violation of faith to disregard the Missouri compromise, which was of so much antiquity and utility to the country? That is a matter of discussion. I have not arraigned the action of any gentleman since the passage of the bill, but anterior to it I gave my opinions in

relation to its character, as a disregard of treaties, and as a flagrant violation of the plighted faith of the nation towards the Indians. With respect to the Missouri compromise, I believe its repeal to be as flagrant a breach of faith as the violation of treaties made with the Indians.

I have not charged Senators with corrupt motives, nor have I charged them with anything selfish; but I certainly can see no more impropriety in ministers of the Gospel, in their vocation, memorializing Congress, than politicians, or other individuals. I do not believe that these ministers have sent this memorial here to manufacture political capital, to have it entered on the records of the Senate, so that it might be taken back and disseminated through the country. Sir, it comes from the country. I told you that there would be agitation; but it was denied upon this floor. Is not this agitation? Three thousand ministers of the living God upon earth—his vicegerents—send a memorial here upon this subject; and yet you tell me that there is no excitement in the country! Sir, you realize what I anticipated. The country has to bear the infliction.

Sir, the *coup d'état* was not successful. The bill did not pass before the community was awoken to it. The community was awoken to it not alone in New England, for I have seen letters from the south and west stating that it was there regarded as a breach of faith; and I can see no wrong in ministers expressing their opinion in regard to it. This protest does not attack the reputation of Senators. It does not displace them from their positions here. It does not impair their capabilities for the discharge of the high functions which the Constitution has devolved upon them. I see nothing wrong in all this. Ministers have a right to remonstrate. They are like other men. Because they are ministers of the Gospel they are not disfranchised of political rights and privileges; and, if their language is respectful to the Senate, in anticipation of the passage of a bill which was obnoxious to them, they have a right to spread their opinions on the records of the nation. The great national heart throbs under this measure; its pulse beats high; and is it surprising that we should observe the effects of it? I trust, sir, that the nation may yet again see the blessed tranquillity that prevailed over the whole country when this "healing measure" was introduced into the Senate. The nation's position was enviable. It was unagitated. There was not, in my recollection, a time so tranquil and a community more happy. A nation more prosperous existed not upon the earth. Sir, I trust that there will be no continuance of agitation; but the way to end it is not to make war upon memorialists. Let them memorialize if they think it necessary. If they state what is incorrect, let the subject be referred to committees, and let the committees give an exposition of the truth, and lay it, in reports, before the public, and then the intelligence of the nation will determine as to what is right,

and what consideration ought to be given to it. I would not take away the liberty to indulge in the freest expression of opinion, or the exercise of the rights and privileges which belong to any portion of this country; yet I would discourage agitation. I may hold the contents of this protest, to some extent, heretical; yet they are not expressed in such offensive language as would justify a denial of their right to memorialize. If it had been intended to impugn our motives or our actions, either as corrupt or immoral, we could bear it. The people surely have a right to think and speak upon our action. We are not placed in a position so high that we are elevated above the questioning power of the people. They have the right to look into our action, and investigate our conduct; and, if they do not approve of it, to express their opinions in relation to it. I shall never make war upon them on that account; yet I trust that, whatever disposition may be made of the bill which we have passed, the agitation has already reached its acme; and that from this point it may decline, until the country is again restored to peace and happiness.

Mr. MASON. That it is the right of the citizens of the United States to petition Congress, or either House of it, upon any subject that may be presented to them, is never denied, never should be denied; and such petition upon any subject of public interest should be received and treated with the respect which is due to citizens. I trust I shall never see the day when the Senate of the United States will treat the authors of such petitions, upon any subject proper for legislation pending before the body, coming from the people of the United States with ought but respect. But I understand this petition to come from a class who have put aside their character of citizens. It comes from a class who style themselves in the petition, ministers of the Gospel, and not citizens. They come before us—I have not understood the petition wrong, I believe—as ministers of the Gospel, not citizens, and denounce prospectively the action of the Senate, in their language, as a moral wrong; and they have the temerity, in the presence of the citizens of the United States, to invoke the vengeance of the Almighty, whom they profess to serve, against us. Sir, ministers of the Gospel are unknown to this Government, and God forbid the day should ever come when they shall be known to it. The great effort of the American people has been, by every form of defensive measures, to keep that class away from the Government; to deny to them any access to it as a class, or any interference in its proceedings. The best illustration of the wisdom of that measure in our Government is to be found in this. Ministers of the Gospel, I repeat, are unknown to the Government. Their mission upon earth is unknown to the Government. Of all others, they are the most encroaching, and, as a body, arrogant class of men. What do these ministers say? Do they as citizens, enter into a statement of the facts of which they complain? Do they recite what will be the political effects

of the measure which they complain? No; they inform us that they come here, through their petition, in the presence of the Almighty, and invoke His vengeance upon the Senate of the United States as about to commit, in their judgment, a great moral wrong.

Now, sir, I am perfectly willing to let any number of citizens protest against the measure which has recently passed the Senate. They have a right to do so, in respectful language, such as becomes gentlemen in addressing each other. If thirty thousand, or three hundred thousand citizens come from New England, let them be heard. It is a respect due to them; but when they come here, not as citizens, but declaring that they come as ministers of the Gospel, and, as the honorable Senator from Texas declared them to be, vicegerents of the Almighty—so I understood him to declare, possibly he meant vice-regents to supervise and control the legislation of the country—I say, when they come here as a class unknown to the Government, a class that the Government does not mean to know in any form or shape, not to recommend or remonstrate, but to denounce our action as a great moral wrong, because they claim to be the “vicegerents” of the Almighty, we are bound—not from disrespect to them as citizens, not from disrespect to the cloth which they do not grace, but from respect to the Government, from respect to that sacred public trust which has been committed to us—to carry out the policy of the Government and refuse to recognize them. Sir, their object, as was well said by the Senator from Illinois, has been agitation—agitation; and I presume that their cloth and their ministry will enable them to agitate with some success. I say, then, Mr. President, in my judgment, it is due to the Government, to the public trust which we are here to administer, that we should carry out the policy of the Government and refuse to recognize these ministers of the Gospel in coming here. I move, therefore, that the petition be not received, as the best evidence of the sense of the Senate of its character.

Mr. BUTLER. It has been received, I believe, and all that is left is to protest against the protestants. I have great respect, Mr. President, for the pulpit. I have such a respect for it that I would almost submit to a rebuke from a minister of the Gospel, even in my official capacity; but they lose a portion of my respect when I see an organization, for, I believe, the first time in the history of this Government, of clergymen within a local precinct, within the limits of New England, assuming, to be, as the Senator from Texas said, the vicegerents of Heaven, coming to the Senate of the United States, not as citizens, as my friend from Virginia has said, but as the organs of God—for they do not come here petitioning or presenting their views under the sanction of the obligations and responsibilities of citizens under the Constitution of the United States, but they have dared to quit the pulpit, and step into the political arena, and speak as the organs

of Almighty God. Sir, they assume to be the foremen of the jury which is to pronounce the verdict and judgment of God upon earth. They do not protest as ordinary citizens do; but they mingle in their protest what they would have us believe is the judgment of the Almighty. When the clergy quit the province which is assigned to them, in which they can dispense the Gospel—that Gospel which is represented as the lamb, not as the tiger or the lion—when they would convert the lamb into the lion, going about in the form of agitators, seeking whom they may devour, instead of the meek and lowly representatives of Christ, they divest themselves of all respect which I can give them. Sir, the ministers of the Gospel are the representatives of the lowly and poor lamb—of Christ; but when the men who have signed that paper—I do not know with what ends; I do not say a word against them as individuals, for I have no doubt they are good and respectable, and many of them Christians—assume to organize themselves as clergymen to come before the country and protest against the deliberations of the Senate of the United States, they deserve, at least, the grave censure of the body.

Mr. ADAMS. During the discussion of the Nebraska bill before the Senate I did not open my mouth; nor should I now but for the remarks which have fallen from the distinguished Senator from Texas, my old and familiar friend. He says there is agitation, and that the display upon your table is evidence of it. Suppose there is agitation; at whose door ought the fault to lie, if there be fault? Was the action of this body right or wrong? If we did what was right and proper, according to the republican institutions of this country, and agitation arises out of it, the responsibility neither rests upon the distinguished Senator who introduced the bill nor those who voted for it. What was that action? This body, by its vote, removed a legislative censure upon the institutions of the South—a censure which has existed for more than thirty years, and under which we had lived submissively until now for the sake of peace. For the first time in thirty years, when that censure could be repealed, when the southern States place themselves as the Constitution places them, upon an equality with the northern States, we are committing a very great outrage when we simply say that the people of every portion of this country within the limits of our Constitutional authority, shall be governed by their own laws in their own way. That is the whole of it.

I concur with my friend from South Carolina in regard to the petition which has been presented and ordered to lie on the table. It is addressed to the Senate and House of Representatives by a body of individuals as ministers of the Gospel. I trust I have as high a regard for their vocation as any other individual, and as much respect for the ministers of peace and good will on earth as any other individual; but when they depart from their

high vocation, and come down to mingle in the turbid pools of politics, I would treat them just as I would all other citizens. I would treat their memorials and remonstrances precisely as I would those of other citizens. It is so unlike the apostles and the ministers of Christ at an early day, that it loses the potency which they suppose the styling themselves ministers of the Gospel would give to their memorials. The early ministers of Christ attended to their mission, one which was given to them by their Master; and under all circumstances, even when the Saviour himself was upon earth, and attempts were made to induce him to give opinions with reference to the municipal affairs of the Government, he refused. These men have descended from their high estate to assail the action of this body. The Senator from Massachusetts, in presenting the petition, has done what he considered to be his duty; but I would remark, however, that with all the respect which belongs to the high character of those individuals as ministers of the Gospel, their petition should, under the circumstances, receive no more respect from us than if it came from any other private citizens.

Mr. HOUSTON. Mr. President, I have the misfortune again to differ from my friends in relation to this measure, but that difference is not sufficient to induce me to enter anew into the discussion of it. I will, however, discuss the propriety of this memorial. The gentlemen misapprehend its character entirely. I understood the honorable Senator from Virginia—but I may have been mistaken—to say that it invoked the vengeance of the Almighty God upon the Senate.

Mr. MASON. In substance it does, as I understand.

Mr. HOUSTON. There is no invocation contained in the memorial. It is a respectful protest, stating their appreciation of the measure then pending before the Senate of the United States, and not one word is contained in it derogatory to the Senate at the time it was drawn, and there is no invocation of wrath or vengeance upon the members of this body. It is a respectful protest, in the name of the Almighty God.

By the expression which I used when I was up before, that they were the vicegerents of the Almighty, I merely intended to say that they were harbingers of peace to their fellow men; and if it was a *lapsus lingue*, or improper expression, it does not change the intention that I then entertained in my mind, of expressing a belief that it was nothing else than an extraordinary emergency that diverted men from their ordinary pursuits in the ministry of the Gospel to engage at all in, or to step even to, the verge of, the political arena.

We are told, Mr. President, that this was intended for the purpose of agitation. It is certainly a manifestation of agitation; but it could not have been intended to create agitation, for the thing was done, and hero is one of its developments and consequences. Yet, sir, I can see nothing wrong in the memorial,

so far as I am concerned. If ministers of the Gospel are not recognized by the Constitution of the United States, they are recognized by the moral and social constitution of society. They are recognized in the constitution of man's salvation. The great Redeemer of the world enjoined duties upon mankind; and there is the moral constitution from which we have derived all the excellent principles of our political constitution—the great principles upon which our Government, morally, socially, and religiously, is founded.

Then, sir, I do not think there is anything very derogatory to our institutions in the ministers of the Gospel expressing their opinions. They have a right to do it. No man can be a minister without first being a man. He has political rights; he has also the rights of a missionary of the Saviour, and he is not disfranchised by his vocation. Certain political restrictions may be laid upon him; he may be disqualified from serving in the legislatures of the States, but that does not discharge him from political and civil obligations to his country. He has a right to contribute, as far as he thinks necessary, to the sustentation of its institutions. He has a right to interpose his voice as one of its citizens against the adoption of any measure which he believes will injure the nation. These individuals have done no more. They have not denounced the Senate, but they have protested, in the capacity of ministers, against what I and other Senators on this floor protested. They have the right to do it, and we cannot take that right from them. They will exercise it. The people have the right to think, and they will exercise that right. They have the right of memorializing, and they will exercise that right. They have the right to express their opinions, and they will exercise that right. They will exercise their rights in reprobation or commendation at the ballot-box, too; and preachers, I believe, vote. They have the right to do so. They are not very formidable numerically, but they have the right to do this as ministers of the Gospel, as well as we Senators have a right to vote for the adoption of a measure; and if it is not in accordance with their opinions they have a right to condemn it. They have the right to think it is morally wrong, politically wrong, civilly wrong, and socially wrong, if they do not interfere with the vested rights of others in the entertainment of those opinions.

I understood my honorable friend from Mississippi to say that the South had been groaning for a long time under this oppressive measure. The South, sir, are a spirited people, and how they could have submitted for more than a third of a century to this indignity, this wrong, this act of oppression, which has ground them down in their prosperity and development, and never have said a word about it until this auspicious moment arrived, and that, too, when political subjects have been agitated at the north and south, that it should have been reserved for the action of the present Congress, after all others had

glided by without complaint, rebuke, remonstrance, or suggestion of appeal, is a most extraordinary thing. My friend does not apprehend it; but there was no excitement out of this Capitol, or out of the city of Washington. It originated here. This was the grand laboratory of political action and political machinery. The object was to mature the measure here, and inflict it, by a *coup d'état*, upon the nation, and then radiate it to every point of the country. The potion does not react pleasantly. There is a response, but how does it go down? Not well. The physic works; it works badly; it works upward.

I am willing to receive any memorials that are presented to this body which are respectable in terms, whether they come from preachers, politicians, civilians, or from the beggars that congregate about your cities, and I will treat them with respect and kindness. As long as they are respectful in terms to this body, though they express their apprehension of a calamity about to fall on the country, it brands no man; and if they denounce a measure in advance, it is what they have a right to do. We have a more eligible position here to advocate our opinions than individuals have in social life to maintain their positions. We have all the panoply of power and State sovereignty thrown around the members of this body to guard and shield them against attacks; but they are thrown in the midst of the community without any shield except it is the shield of morality and propriety of conduct which gives protection to their person. While they express themselves respectfully, I shall never treat with disrespect preachers or any other individuals who come before this body to give us their opinions upon political subjects.

Mr. EVERETT. Mr. President, as this memorial was presented by me, I think it my duty to say a few words to the Senate by way of explaining my relations to it. Just after the Senate came to order this morning, I was called from my seat to the door of the Senate chamber, and there requested to take charge of it—this memorial. The gentleman in whose hands it was, with whom I had not the pleasure of a previous personal acquaintance, was introduced to me, as I have no doubt he is, a most respectable member of the clerical profession; and I was requested by him to take charge of the memorial and present it to the Senate. Seeing that it was a very voluminous document, and one which I could not carry with me to my seat, and there hand it, in the usual manner, to the attendants of the Senate, I directed one of them near me at the door to take it immediately to the table of the Secretary, so that I have had no opportunity whatever of inspecting it. I presented it to the Senate but a moment or two after it was placed in my charge, and, in point of fact, I had not read a word of it before I cast my eye over it and a few of the signatures at the head of it, in conjunction with the Senator from Illinois, the chairman of the Committee on the Territories, as we were standing together at the Secretary's table. I think it due

to myself, as a matter of fact, that these circumstances should be stated, because the Senator from Illinois has objected to the language of the memorial, as disrespectful to the Senate, and as personally offensive to him, in common with the other members of the body who supported the bill. I am aware of the reserve which is imposed by the rules of the Senate on the presentation of memorials; and I deem it, therefore, no more than justice to myself that the Senate should understand precisely the circumstances under which this memorial was offered by me.

I think, however, sir, that I ought to go further, and, inasmuch as the time of its presentation is objected to, express, in justice to the memorialists, the opinion that this memorial was signed by probably every individual whose name is subscribed to it before the final action of the Senate on the Nebraska bill. It is probable, in collecting together the separated papers which had been circulated for signatures, and in preparing the memorial to be transmitted, in the copy of the caption which was made for that purpose, the date of the first of March was appended to it, without considering that many of the memorialists, probably all, must have signed it before that day. It ought not, therefore, to be considered, as has been complained of, as a protest directed against a measure which so large a majority of the Senate had previously sanctioned, but as the expression of the opinion entertained by those who signed it of a measure still pending before the Senate.

I do not undertake to vouch that this is the fact; but I presume that Senators will themselves, on reflection, consider that it must be so; and that the memorial must have been signed by a majority, if not by every individual whose name is there, while the measure was in its progress, and not after it had received the approbation of a great majority of this body.

My own opinion in relation to presenting memorials to the Senate in reference to measures that have passed from our control would be, that it is, generally speaking, not expedient. In a single instance of a memorial against the Nebraska bill, sent to me since the measure left this body, I have, at the suggestion of the person who sent it, instead of presenting it here, put it into the hands of the member of the other House who represents the district where the memorialists live. That was done at the request of the person who forwarded the memorial. Observing, however, that other Senators around me, in many cases, did present memorials which had reached them since the bill passed through the Senate, and contemplating the possibility that it might again come before us, after having undergone amendment in the other House, and that there was therefore still a propriety in its being considered, to a qualified extent, in our possession, I have thought there was no irregularity in that point of view, in presenting any memorial to which there was no objection on other grounds. On this principle I have acted in reference to several me-

morials against the Nebraska bill which have been sent to me during the past week.

In reference to the objections taken to the language of the memorial, and the concerted movement in which it has originated, I must say to the Senator from Illinois, that I do not believe there is anything in it intended for political effect. I have no belief that these three thousand clergymen from all parts of New England, in preparing and signing this memorial, have intended, in the smallest degree, to step from their sacred profession into the arena of party politics. I am confident it would be found, if it were possible to make the inquiry, that the memorial is signed by individuals of all political parties; that those who differ on every political question, in the common acceptation of the term, will be found to have united on this occasion; that this paper really expresses the sincere conviction of men who look at this subject strictly in a moral and religious aspect, and that, so far from designing to take any part in the agitations that trouble the land, they have regarded the question solely in the other point of view in which it is natural it should present itself to their minds.

This has, from time immemorial, been the custom of the members of that profession, in that part of the country, although not confined to it. They have been in the habit, in reference to public questions which have strongly appealed to the sensibilities of the community, and which they regarded as having momentous moral and religious bearings, of expressing their opinions in this way; and I am quite sure, as I said before, that on this occasion they have not intended to lay aside—they have not thought they were laying aside—their sacred character for the sake of joining in political agitation, or affecting the result of any political controversy. And, sir, I think I need not say, that a body of over three thousand clergymen, comprehending more than three fourths of the clerical profession of New England, of all denominations, is a very respectable body, that it must faithfully represent the public opinion of a very large and most intelligent portion of the community, and that it is entitled to the most respectful consideration on the part of this body. I do not wish, as a citizen myself of that part of the Union, to say any thing that would be thought extravagant, or dictated by local partiality or that point, but I must say that I do not think it would be possible to find any body of men of the same number embracing a greater amount of personal and moral worth than these three thousand and fifty individuals. The greater portion of them are necessarily men of education. They are persons whose lives are consecrated, with very little reward in what are called this world's goods, to the highest objects to which the life and labors of a man can be devoted. Of course, in such a large number of men, there may be individual exceptions, but I do think that, in general, it may be very fairly said they are as exemplary, as intelligent, and as respectable a body of men as any other in

the country, not to say in the world; and I must repeat my conviction, that on this occasion they were animated by no desire to embark in the strife and agitation of the world of politics; but that feeling they were performing a duty that devolved upon them, they have expressed their honest and sincere conviction of the character of the measure in question, contemplated in a moral and religious point of view.

I regret that the presentation of this memorial, which, under the circumstances, I could regard in no other light than as a duty to a large number of my own immediate constituents, should have awakened any feelings on the part of any member of the Senate. It is but three or four days since my friend from New York [Mr. FISH] presented a similar memorial—I mean similar in its object, for I have had no opportunity of comparing the terms in which it is couched—subscribed by almost every clergyman in the city of New York. It was headed by the distinguished bishop of the eastern diocese of that State; and it was represented to be signed by a large majority of the clergy of that city. No exception was taken in the Senate to that memorial; none to its terms; none to the facts of the presentation. It was received in the usual form and ordered to lie upon the table in the usual manner. That, if I recollect right, was since the passage of the bill; and it took the course which other numerous memorials have taken which have also been presented since its passage. I think it would be wise and expedient that this memorial also should be received and disposed of in the usual way. I am quite sure that it would be doing injustice to the individuals who signed it, many of whom are personally known to me, as men venerable for years, distinguished for learning, and of the utmost purity of life and character, to reject their memorial as having been prompted by any desire to kindle angry passions, or to engage in political controversy; but that we ought to give them the credit for having expressed honestly and sincerely the feelings and opinions which they entertained of this measure as a moral and religious question.

I do not know, sir, that I have any thing more to say on this subject. I felt that it was due to the relation in which, without any previous intimation, I have been placed to the memorialists that I should say this much.

Mr. PETTIT. Mr. President, I am for the greatest liberty to the greatest number, and I will not deny to any class of my fellow citizens, under whatever name or denomination they may appear, the right to petition; and under the general term "petition," provided for in the Constitution, I am willing to regard memorials and remonstrances, of whatever name, kind, or description, provided always they are respectful to the Senate. But they should be viewed in another light, and that is as to the propriety of time.

Then the first objection which I make to this remonstrance is not to its terms, not to it of itself, but to the time of its presentation.

All memorializing and all petitioning is upon the basis or hypothesis that some good is to come of it; that there is something pending, or likely to be pending, to which it may refer. In that view, it is certainly too late now to present this memorial, though, as for that, I care but little. The bill has passed from us, never to return to us, in all probability. We have done our deed, for good or for evil, for weal or for woe. We are to have, I suppose, the righteous judgments of the country and of the Almighty upon us for the doing of that deed. I presume this memorial intends to convey the idea, although it does not say so distinctly, that we subject ourselves to the righteous judgments of the Almighty, to judgments which are terrible and fearful, judgments of torment, of pain, and of misery. I will not, however, so construe it, for my own gratification at least. I am willing to say that the righteous judgments of the Almighty held in reserve for us are those of approval and reward. I doubt not that we shall receive, through the country, through our fellow-citizens, that judgment of reward and approval. The bill, however, to which this remonstrance relates, has passed from us, not to return. It has gone entirely to the other House, and I can see no propriety in piling upon our table remonstrances against the passage of a measure which we have already passed.

But, sir, the Senator from Mississippi [Mr. ADAMS] says he has great respect and great reverence for the clergy, for the ministers of the Gospel, as such, while they keep their robes pure and unspotted; but when they descend to the turbid pools of politics, and besmirch their garments all over with the mud, and slime, and filth which he would make you believe is to be found there, he loses all respect for them. So should I, if I could be led to believe that the waters of the pool of politics were any more turbid or filthy than the waters which flow through their contradictory streams of theology. I do not believe it, sir. I hold, on the contrary, that the waters of the pools of politics are infinitely more translucent, and pure, and cheering, and refreshing, than the pool which surrounds their stagnant waters of theology—no two of them agreeing on any proposition which can be presented.

I am, however, totally incompetent to judge of this matter. These men, as has been well said by the Senator from Virginia, have not come to you as fellow-citizens. The Constitution has secured to the citizens of the United States the right at all times to petition, and they shall never be denied that right by me, whether they choose to use the name of citizens or any other. But they have not remonstrated in their own name as citizens, nor in behalf of their fellow-citizens; but they have come, as they tell you, as the ambassadors of a higher and an omnipotent power. They use the language of an ambassador who says, "in the name of my Government, I declare to you this, that, or the other." In the name of God, and in the name of his vice-

lated law, they declare this. They say that to them alone is given the power to divulge or to divine that law on earth. Sir, being totally incompetent, avowing here my total incapacity and inability to expound, divine, and illustrate that law, I shall leave it to a different forum and a different place.

These memorialists do not tell us that the measure against which they protest, will injure the country, or that it is a wrong to their fellow-citizens; but that it is a violation of the law of Him, their master, who, they claim, has sent them. The propriety of such a remonstrance may well be questioned; yet I will not undertake to question it.

Sir, this, then, is an ecclesiastical, not a political question. They have withdrawn it from the political arena. They have said that they are sent by the Divine Creator, the Maker and enforcer of divine law, commissioned to put forth and to thunder on our devoted heads his anathemas and his judgments in advance. As a secular body, we are entirely incompetent to judge of what that law is, or whether we have offended against it or not. These men say they are commissioned to expound it on earth to us. We have, however, provided ourselves for all these contingencies. When the people, in their political capacity, send their petitions or memorials here, they know we are competent to understand them, and to provide for their interests. But, sir, I suppose we have taken a step with a view of meeting the present condition of affairs. We have provided ourselves with a law officer of this law—an expounder of the divine law; a "brother" of the same class with those who now remonstrate; an officer of this body, who, from his age, his high standing, and many endorsements here, must be supposed to be as capable of expounding that law as any of these remonstrants. I think the fact that he has been selected by a body of such intelligence as the Senate, shows that he ought to be superior to any of them as an officer of that law which these men say we have violated and outraged. I will therefore suggest, at any rate, and I believe I shall propose, that this remonstrance be referred to the Rev. Henry Slicer, Chaplain of this Senate, for examination and report. [Laughter.]

Now, sir, I want to know whether the officer of the Senate whom we have elected and appointed to expound the divine law and the divine will to us, will, not upon any oath of office, but upon his responsibility as an officer of this body, after calmly and deliberately weighing our actions here with the whole tendency, bearing, and spirit of the revealed will of God, say to us that we have so violated it. If he will, I believe I shall be ready to retract my vote on the bill, and agree to adopt his report, and go to my colleagues in the other House, and ask them for God's sake to send back the bill here, in order that we may retract our steps.

This, I repeat, is an ecclesiastical question. We are threatened with the anathemas, the thunders of the Almighty against us for violating his law. As a secular body here, we

are no judges of that law; but we have provided ourselves with one who is judge of it; and to him I think this whole matter ought to be referred. I think it will be no disrespect to the memorialists or the petitioners if we do so. They claim that they are gentlemen of the cloth, preachers of the Gospel. Now, we have elected one, and he is here, who is a gentleman of the cloth, and a minister of the Gospel of long experience; and I should be exceedingly glad to have his official report on this question, as to whether we are in danger, whether we have invoked the just and righteous judgments of God upon us. Therefore, sir, if it is in order, I will move to refer the memorial to the Rev. Henry Slicer, the Chaplain of the Senate. [Laughter.]

Mr. DOUGLAS. So far as I am concerned, I am willing that the memorial shall be allowed to lie upon the table. The reason why I called attention to it at all was this: I have seen a deliberate attempt to organize the clergy of this country into a great political sectional party for Abolition schemes. That project was put forth clearly in the Abolition manifesto which I had to expose in my opening speech upon the Nebraska bill. This is a response to that Abolition manifesto. It is an attempt to give in the adhesion of the religious societies of this country through the clergy to the Abolition and political schemes of that organization. If these preachers choose to go into that political organization it is not for me to object, provided they confine their operations to the country, and do not send their insults here. I have no idea that these men would ever have dreamt of bringing forward such an objectionable document as this, but in response to that call which emanated from the Senate. It was by Senators in their official capacity as Senators, and these remonstrances have been sent back in response to the call.

Now, sir, what is this remonstrance? These men do not protest as citizens. They do not protest in the name either of themselves or of their fellow-citizens. They do not even protest in *their own names* as clergymen, against this act, but they say that 'WE PROTEST IN THE NAME OF ALMIGHTY GOD,' and in order to make it more emphatic that they claim to speak by authority in their remonstrance, they underscore in broad black lines the words 'IN THE NAME OF ALMIGHTY GOD.' It is true they describe themselves as ministers of the Gospel, but they claim to speak in the name of the Almighty upon a political question pending in the Congress of the United States. It is an attempt to establish in this country the doctrine that a body of men organized and known among the people as clergymen, have a peculiar right to determine the will of God in relation to legislative action. It is an attempt to establish a theocracy to take charge of our politics and our legislation. It is an attempt to make the legislative power of this country subordinate to the church. It is not only to unite Church and State, but it is to put the State in subor-

dination to the dictates of the church. Sir, you cannot find in the most despotic countries, in the darkest ages, a bolder attempt on the part of the ministers of the Gospel to usurp the power of Government, and to say to the people: "You must not think for yourselves; you must not dare to act for yourselves; you must in all matters pertaining to the affairs of this life, as well as the next, receive instructions from us; and that, too, in the performance of your civil and official, as well as your religious duties."

Sir, I called attention to this matter for the purpose of showing that it involved a great principle subversive of our free institutions. If we recognize three thousand clergymen as having a higher right to interpret the will of God than we have, we destroy the right of self-action, of self-government, of self-thought, and we are merely to refer each of our political questions to this body of clergymen to inquire of them whether it is in conformity with the law of God and the will of the Almighty or not. This document, I repeat, purports to speak in the name of Almighty God, and then enters a protest in that name. We are put under the ban, we are excommunicated, the gates of Heaven are closed unless we obey this behest and stop in our course and carry out these Abolition views.

The Senator from Texas says the people have a right to petition. I do not question it. I do not wish to deprive ministers of the Gospel of that right. I do not acknowledge that there is any member of this body who has a higher respect and veneration either for a minister of the Gospel or for his holy calling than I have; but my respect is for him in *his calling*. I will not controvert what the Senator from Massachusetts has said as to there being, perhaps, no body of men in this country, three thousand in number, who combine more respectability than these clergymen. Probably they combine all the respectability which he claims for them; but I will add, that I doubt whether there is a body of men in America who combine so much profound ignorance on the question upon which they attempt to enlighten the Senate, as this same body of preachers. How many of them, do you suppose sir, have ever taken up and read the act of 1820 to which I allude? Do you think there is one of them who has done so? How many of them ever read the votes by which the North repudiated that act of 1820? Do you think one of them ever did? How many of them ever read the various votes which I quoted on that act and the Arkansas act? Do you think one of them knew anything about them? How many of them have ever traced the course of the compromise measures of 1850 on the record? One of them? Yet they assume, in the name of the Almighty, to judge of facts, and laws, and votes, of which they know nothing, and which they have no time to understand, if they perform their duties as clergymen to their respective flocks.

They do not pretend to judge from the knowledge of this world, from the records of

the Senate, or from the statute-book, or from any of the sources of information on which Senators and citizens predicate their action; but by the will and the law of God, and in his name, and in consequence of their divine mission, they overrule all these and prescribe a new test, and, in that name, they tell us that by the passage of the bill which we have passed, we have committed a moral wrong. They tell us that it is subversive of all confidence in national engagements.

Now, let me ask, are these men particularly tenacious of national engagements? Did they in their pulpits, in 1850 and 1851, tell their followers that they were bound by their oaths, and by their religious duty, to surrender fugitive slaves in obedience to the constitution? Did they then tell their people that they must perform national engagements? Did they then tell their flocks that the Senate was right in carrying out the provisions of the constitution? Have they been particularly in the habit of enjoining in the pulpit and from the sacred desk, as a matter of conscience, that the people should perform the national engagements contained in the constitution of our country, and which we are all sworn to support? Sir, I do not remember that any one of these three thousand preachers, at the time when in Boston and other points of this country there were attempts to resist the fugitive slave law by force, came forward and said it was a divine duty to perform national engagements. If they did, I have not seen the evidence of it. If they felt it was a matter of conscience and of duty on the part of the clergy to supervise the fulfilment of national engagements, to preserve the public faith, and the public honor, where were they then, when your constitution was trampled upon, when oaths of office could not bind men to perform their constitutional duty, when public honor was being outraged? Where then were these three thousand clergymen? We did not hear from them on that occasion. There was a national engagement which no man can deny; yet they did not raise their voices against its violation. But in this case, merely because some Abolitionists from this body have said that an act of Congress constituted a national engagement, although the statement is contradicted by the record, they come forward at the bidding of an abolition *junta*, to arraign the Senate of the United States in the name of the Almighty!

Sir, I deny their authority. I deny that they have any such commission from the Almighty to decide this question. I deny that our constitution confers any such right upon them. I deny that the Bible confers any such right upon them. They can perform their duties within their sphere without my censure or my interference, and they are responsible to the Almighty for the manner in which they perform those duties; and I must be left to perform my duties within the sphere of my functions, with no other responsibility than to my constituents and to the Almighty, without the interference of those men. I do not acknowledge them as an intermediate tribunal.

Rev. Mr. Oldenough: "Lack-a-day, lack-a-day, a learned man, but intemperate; overzeal hath eaten him up."

These gentlemen do not come here in the character of petitioners. These gentlemen do not come here in the character of remonstrants. They do not come here in the character of memorialists; but they come as protestors, not in their own name, not with the individual weight and authority which might be attributed to their protest on the ground of their own intelligence or worth, not merely with the weight and authority which might be superadded to this and other considerations from the fact of their being ministers of the Gospel. It is impossible to look at this paper without seeing that the honorable Senator from New York has specially pleaded upon the subject, and that the reverend gentlemen who signed it will not thank him for assigning them in this paper the low position in which he wishes to place them. What is it?

"The undersigned clergymen of different religious denominations in New England, hereby, in the name of Almighty God, solemnly protest."

In their official characters as ministers of Almighty God, and in his name, they protest against the passage of the Nebraska bill.

Now, sir, these are educated gentlemen. They are men of experience in their vocation. They understand the true and solemn import of the words here used; and I have not the shadow of a doubt that they meant to enter a protest, as the language imports, as a protest, through them, of the Almighty God himself, speaking to this Senate. It is not an expression preparatory to a solemn act to be done by them; for all that is completed when they declare that they speak in the presence of God—that is to say, with a solemn recollection of His presence, realizing His superintendence over what they are doing. What, then, do they mean, when they add that they speak in His name, unless it is that they speak by His authority? That can admit of no doubt.

Well, then, sir, the whole paper proceeds in the same name and by the same authority; and, among other things, they protest against the measure as a great moral wrong, a breach of faith eminently injurious to the moral principles of the community, subversive of all confidence in national engagements, and as exposing us to the righteous judgments of the Almighty. All that is announced by these gentlemen, as ministers of God, affecting to speak in His name.

The interpretation of the paper, sir, I think it is impossible to mistake; but I have said that I think too much importance, decidedly too much importance has been attached to it. Whether this is to be understood as a denunciation of the judgments of God, or as a prediction of his judgments, I deny the authority to denounce, and I deny the gift of prophecy, and, therefore, I think we need not have troubled ourselves further on the subject.

Each of these reverend gentlemen being in the habit, in his vocation and in his particular department, of ruling and governing his congregation, gets habitually, of course, the habit of speaking on all occasions with authority. I believe that they meant it as speaking by authority. I believe they thought they had authority for what they said, and that there was nothing improper in extending that authoritative style of speaking, in the name of the Master whose ministers they are, to the Senate, as they are in the habit of doing in their ordinary ministrations to the congregations who acknowledge them as pastors. But why should that disturb us? Who cares for it? Does any body believe they have power to hurl the thunder bolts of heaven? Does any man believe that they are gifted with the spirit of prophecy, and able to announce to us what, in the future course of things, will come to pass? Not at all. I dare say they are very good men, but, like the Rev. Mr. Oldenough, over zealous; and there, for one, I am willing to leave the subject. I move, then, that the memorial lie upon the table.

The motion was agreed to.